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ABSTRACT

A family-oriented geography field course about the southwestern United States was conducted in 1978 by a community college in Michigan (Delta College). Course activities took place in Colorado. The major purpose of the field experience was to offer learning experiences to family groups rather than to individual students. For purposes of the field course, the family was interpreted to include nuclear families, single parent families with children, couples, and single person families. Teaching methods were based on the multiple age structure and multiple learning levels of the family unit. The course centered on five topics: (1) topography, flora, and fauna of the Colorado Plateau along the Colorado River; (2) cultural aspects related to settlement patterns of the area; (3) institutional aspects such as visitor centers, museums, mines, and businesses; (4) group dynamics involved in interactions between students of various ages, instructors, and resource persons; and (5) social aspects of potlucks, campfires, and recreation. Activities involved participants in traveling from Michigan to the Southwest, camping, rock identification, writing and art exercises, group discussion, and compiling and viewing slide shows. Feedback indicated that participants enjoyed the program and learned a lot about geography. The success of the program implies that field experiences are particularly beneficial to family groups and that field experiences may increase interest in geography. (DB)

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FAMILY ORIENTED FIELD EXPERIENCE IN GEOGRAPHY

Karen A. Williams

SO 011 266

Paper presented at the
64th year, annual meeting of

THE
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GEOGRAPHIC EDUCATION

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

October 20, 1978

FAMILY ORIENTED FIELD EXPERIENCE IN GEOGRAPHY

During July, 1978, Delta College conducted a family oriented field course to the southwestern United States as a part of a broad range of course offerings in inter-generational education and life-long learning. The purpose of this course was to offer a geographic learning program for all members of a family.

The study area focused on the Colorado Plateau. This area was selected because it has a strong popular appeal to families from a recreational standpoint as well as geographic unity from an educational point of view.

Credit was available in three forms:

1. Undergraduate credit in geography through Delta College, a two year community college.
2. Service credit through Delta College in community education, a non-degree program for community service.
3. Graduate credit in education through Saginaw Valley State College, a four year college nearby.

Barriers to Communication

It is amazing how words conjure up feelings. There are many words in the geographic profession which can block some people's listening abilities. Just the mention of a term can raise a wall or a communication barrier which blocks meaning and understanding. Mention the word "travel-study" and the response is often, "Oh, a tax deductible vacation!:"

Even geography is one of these words. To many it is still strange lands and funny peoples.

Another term that is often misunderstood is field. In 1977, the Society for Field Experience Education met in Indianapolis, Indiana. Most of the sessions entitled field experience focused on career education. The term field was used to refer to an occupation, rather than the area studies of geography. Using field experience as a descriptor in the Educational Journal Index or in ERIC, most of the articles found refer to "on the job training", also.

The term family education can also be misinterpreted. To many it means "sex education".

In an attempt to improve communication, let us first define the key terms used in the title of this paper: GEOGRAPHY, FIELD EXPERIENCE, and FAMILY ORIENTED. Geography is the science of things on the earth's surface. It answers the questions:

Where is it?

Why is it there? and

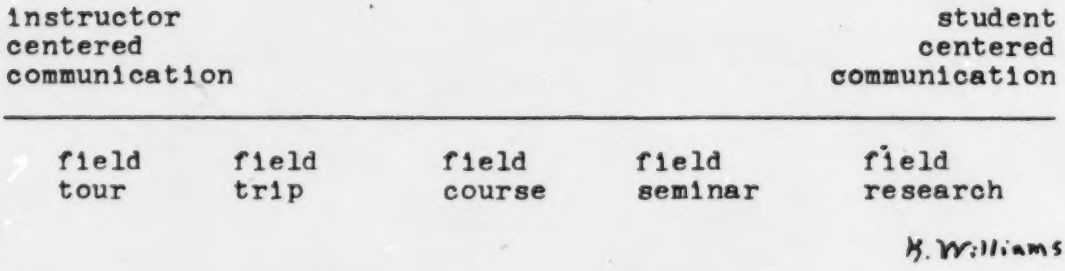
What is the significance of it?

Field experience is defined as any field based learning programs. It encompasses any learning experience conducted outside of the traditional classroom setting. The phrase "family oriented" implies that the concepts to be taught, the delivery system, and the logistical organization of the course are built around the needs of all members of the family group.

Geographic Field Experience

Field experience has been the core of geographic study for many years. Figure 1, puts the nature of geographic field experience into perspective by using a continuum. The ends of the continuum reflect the nature of the interaction between the instructor and his students. Progressing from right to left, the instructor plays a decreasing role in the dissemination of knowledge, while the student plays an increasing role in gathering and analyzing geographic data. The divisions between components on the continuum are not clear cut, overlapping in many areas. However, five distinct areas can be recognized: FIELD TOUR, FIELD TRIP, FIELD COURSE, FIELD SEMINAR and FIELD RESEARCH.

GEOGRAPHIC FIELD EXPERIENCE CONTINUUM MODEL figure 1



FIELD TOUR: From the above perspective, the field tour is the least student centered. Field work focuses on an instructor-prepared area where a student is taken for the purpose of showing. For this field experience, the student needs no previous knowledge of the area.

FIELD TRIP: A field trip usually is an extention of a classroom based learning program. The instructor is illustrating the text and/or classroom concepts. The purpose of the communication is discussing the illustration. This field experience may be part of an introductory class in geography.

FIELD COURSE: A field course is based upon field work within an area. Some classroom work may be done ahead of time, but most data collection is done in the field study area. The purpose of the course is observing the real world. Both instructor and student share in the planning, executing, and evaluating of the experience, but to varying degrees. Usually there are only limited prerequisities for this type of field experience.

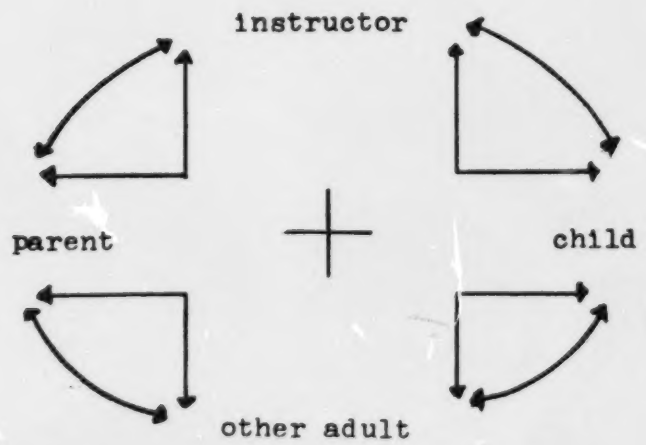
FIELD SEMINAR: A field seminar operates with the student and instructor helping to structure the study. The purpose of the seminar is analyzing the area as practical use of geographic techniques, usually, field experience or advanced classroom work in geography is a prerequisite.

FIELD RESEARCH. A field research class is usually for a student to apply geographic concepts to the study of any area. The purpose of a field study would be in evaluating a selected phenomena in detail. The planning and execution of the study is undertaken by the student, with the instructor primarily serving as an advisor and evaluator. This type of field experience is undertaken only after a strong geographic background has been achieved.

A New Perspective on Geographic Field Experience

Unlike the traditional field experience, family oriented field experience is aimed at the multiple age structure and multiple levels of learning possibilities present in the family unit. What makes these courses unique is the emphasis on the family as opposed to the individual as the instructional target. As discussed above, geographic field experience focuses on the informational flow between a student and his instructor on a one to one relationship. Another way of expressing it would be instructor and other adult. A family communicates betwen parent and child. In the family oriented approach, informational flow follows a feedback loop through four elements: INSTRUCTOR, PARENT, CHILD and OTHER ADULT. Figure 2, models the communication circuits along which all family members regardless of age, participate in the learning program.

COMMUNICATION CIRCUITS MODEL figure 2



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The Extended Family Pot

A family oriented field course at Delta College is built on a very broad definition of the term family. The following definitions are based upon the types of course participants that have walked through the office doorway. These include:

1. The nuclear family consisting of a married couple and their children.
2. The one parent family where a widowed or divorced parent lives with their children.
3. The couple with or without children, but the children are not participants.
4. The single person is a family of one.

These four ingredients are mixed together in an extended family pot shown in figure 3. The fuel for the fire of learning includes these logs:

ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS of the study area such as the topography, flora and fauna.

CULTURAL ASPECTS related to the settlement patterns of the study area.

INSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS of visitor centers, museums, mines, and businesses.

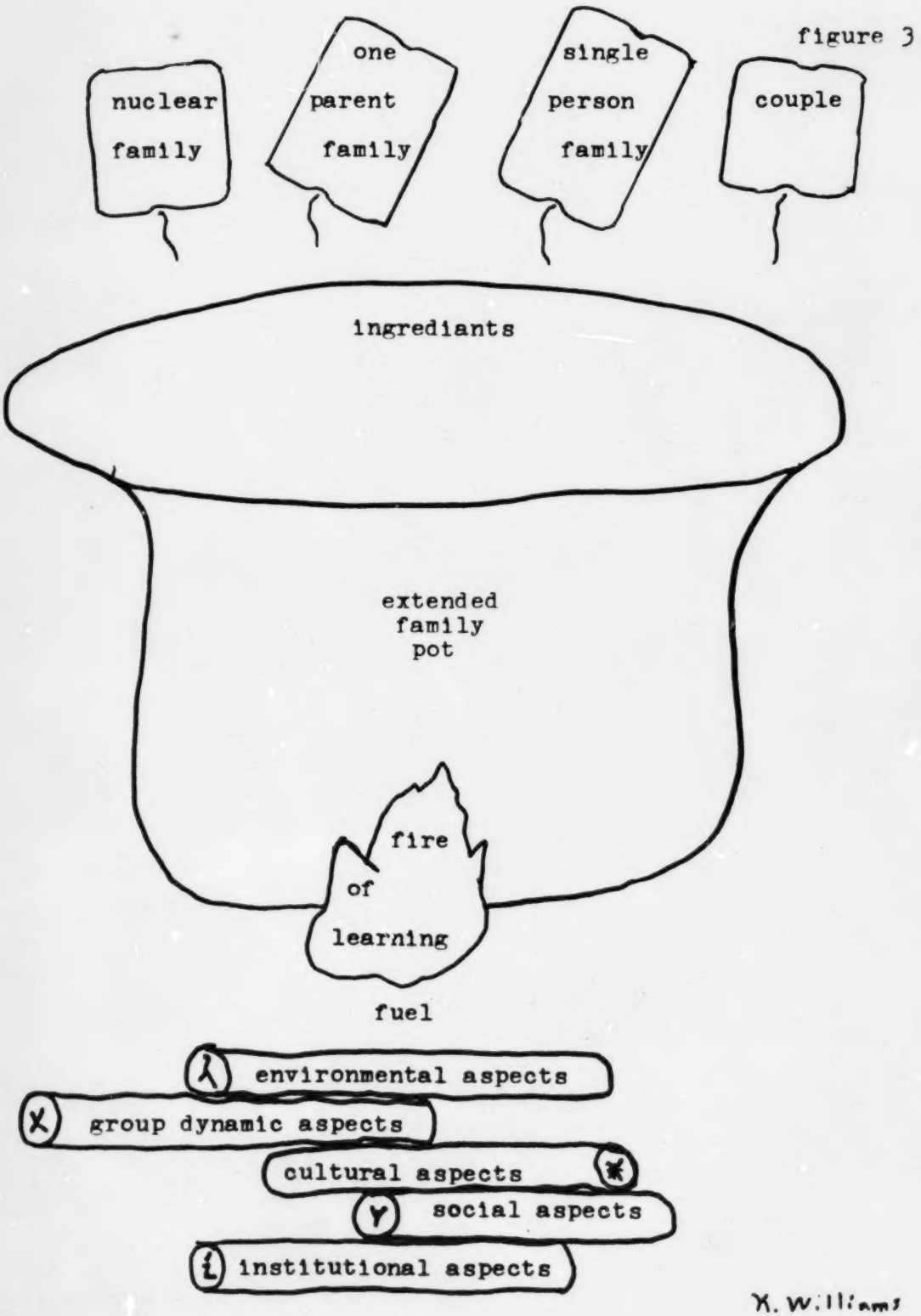
GROUP DYNAMICS ASPECTS of student-instructor interaction, resource person-student interaction, and intergenerational interaction.

SOCIAL ASPECTS of potlucks, campfires, and recreational interaction.

These are the people, places and things which make the model work.

EXTENDED FAMILY MODEL FOR GEOGRAPHIC FIELD EXPERIENCE

figure 3



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A New Orientation

How all of these aspects work together to make a good field experience can be demonstrated with the use of slides.

PRE-TRIP ACTIVITIES

SLIDE 1: The sign "Utah or Bust" was the theme of this year's field course. This was to signify the pioneering spirit of trying new experiences.

SLIDE 2: Camping in the instructor's front yard was the assignment for the day. Since the participants were residents from all over the state of Michigan, weekend class sessions were necessary. Equipment ranged from the bare necessities of a tent to the luxury of air conditioned comfort in a 20-foot trailer.

SLIDE 3: Trade the college classroom for a rock identification laboratory on a picnic table in the front yard.

SLIDE 4: Or a "front yard clothesline" exhibiting writing expression. The participants artistically created their unique impressions of what they expected to see or do during the three weeks in the field.

SLIDE 5: After setting crayons to paper, it was time to set pencil to paper for a hand at journal writing. All family members who could express themselves in this manner were helped to develop their writing skills under the gentle guidance of a resource person.

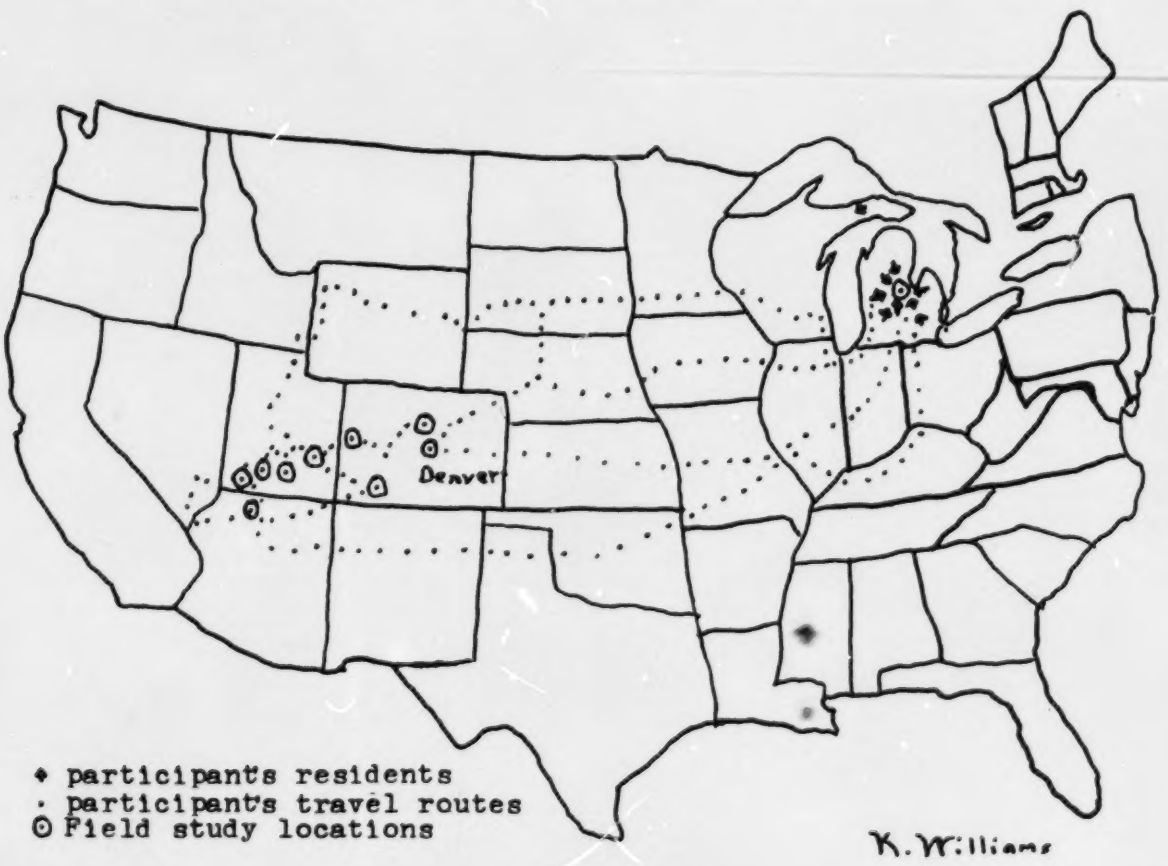
SLIDE 6: The sandbox was a gathering place for people of all ages. Here, it serves as an erosion demonstration by one of the resource persons.

SLIDE 7: Socialization and group dynamics took many structured and unstructured forms from getting acquainted exercises to potluck meals.

ON-TRIP ACTIVITIES

After the pre-trip activities were completed, it was time to finish last minute details at home and start westward for a campground outside of Denver, Colorado, figure 4. This was a place for repairs and supplies before crossing the Rocky Mountains into the main focus area of the Colorado Plateau and its canyon country along the Colorado River, and its tributaries. Educationally, Denver offers a good overview of the area, a number one Museum of Natural History and family entertainment.

FAMILY ORIENTED FIELD COURSE CONDUCTED JULY, 1978 figure 4



Western National Parks
July 5-21, 1978

Join a modern day wagon train to the land of mountains turned "upside down!" The states Arizona, Utah, and Colorado will give us an infinite variety of learning experiences. Trip costs include tuition, cost fees of $25.00 per adult, $9.00 additional for families with children, and all travel expenses and transportation are to be handled by participants. Group reservations will be made at campgrounds for which you will be billed later. Deposit of $25.00 is required upon application. Four (4) hours of credit in either geography or geology can be earned.

Itinerary

July 5	Denver, Colorado
July 6	Estes Park, Colorado - Rocky Mountain National Park
July 7	Georgetown and Leadville, Colorado
July 8	Colorado National Monument, Grand Junction, Colorado
July 9-12	Moab, Utah - Arches and Canyonlands National Parks
July 13	Capitol Reef National Park, Torry, Utah
July 14-16	Bryce Canyon National Park, Panguitch, Utah
July 17	Zion National Park, Springdale, Utah
July 18	Grand Canyon (North Rim) National Park
July 19-20	Grand Canyon (South Rim) National Park
July 21	Mesa Verde National Park (Optional)

SLIDE 9: Experiencing the environment can be a walk across the tundra looking for the beginnings of the Colorado River, through rain, snow, and sunshine.

SLIDE 10: A family identity project is a sign which represents each family as a unque unity. The Williams 3M Company sign was placed in front of the camper at each campground. This was a conversational starting point with fellow travellers.

ON-TRIP ACTIVITIES (cont.)

SLIDE 11: Hiking in the Fiery Furnace of Arches National Park Proved to be a big struggle for some members of the group, but the extended family extended a helping hand.

SLIDE 12: Flying over Canyonlands and Arches National Parks can be risky business, especially in the middle of a thunderstorm, but fantastic scenery.

SLIDE 13: Then experiencing the Colorado River in the maner of John Wesley Powell, it is time to board a raft for a day on the river.

SLIDE 14: The trip ended with bailing buckets being used to throw water on each other until all three boats were having a free-for-all. Even the dirty water was a treat for such a hot day.

SLIDE 15: Field experience can be a horseback ride through Bryce Canyon National Park for three hours. The vistas changed as we wound our way to the bottom and returned.

SLIDE 16: Excellant resource persons can be found among the park rangers. Their job is to interpret the landscape to all visitors regardless of age, who will only take the time to listen.

SLIDE 17: Zion National Park's hike to the Narrows can provide experiences for all the senses, such as touching the water dripping from the overhanging rocks. A child can be part of intergenerational learning with other adults.

SLIDE 18: Children as well as parents and other adults can benefit from an hour in a museum or visitor center. Each institution provides an introduction and interpretation of the local area.

SLIDE 19: The campfire was a gathering place for the group to discuss, to learn, and to evaluate. And a time to say, "See you at the next campground."

POST-TRIP ACTIVITIES

With the field time completed, it is now time to organize materials collected, develop the slides, and get the camper ready for the post-trip activities, once again, on the front lawn.

SLIDE 20: Parent and child working together on evaluation of learning by building the Grand Canyon in the sandbox. This evaluation can be exciting and informative in a non-written form.

SLIDE 21: Intergenerational memory time is looking at data collected in the form of slides, prints and movies. Much more evaluation takes place while listening to the unrehearsed comments expressed by the group while watching pictures than expected.

SLIDE 22: The hours passed quickly while watching pictures in the basement with breaks for intergenerational football on the front lawn.

SLIDE 23: And potluck meals on the back porch.

SLIDE 24: This is not the comfortable world of the college campus. Gone is the security of the college classroom. Gone is the student as a number in the record book. Gone is the non-involvement in the student's personal life. Gone, also, is the posted office hours schedule. The field instructor is on "24 hour call::"

This is the extended family in the model made real, sharing never to be forgotten experiences.

Conclusion

Finally, what does this mean to the individual teacher of geography?

First, American Education today is under going great changes. Declining enrollments are found at all levels. More people are returning to education after years of absence. Some return to be retrained, but many are coming back to enrich their lives. Particularily, the community college has begun to develop programs geared to the needs of life-long learning, with its elements of multi-age and multi-learning levels, but especially to the family unit.

Second, enrollment in geography is down. New markets which can serve to broaden the base of geography must be found. The field experience described here fits well into the field course mode on the geographic field experience continuum. However, there is no reason why family oriented field experiences could not be developed by geographers to fit all components of the continuum; from popular field tours emphasizing exploration to aiding families in the detailed planning of their own trips.

Third, in the United States unlike many countries, few people outside of the academic community have a strong recognition of geography as a subject or of what a geographer does. There is a need to bridge the gap between the Annals and the National Geographic in the eyes of the American public. The National Geographic still brings out the explorer image in each person. Geographers could help bridge this gap by planning field experiences that are developed around this urge for exploration, but in the process, help all ages to better understand their environment.

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